The National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service: Questions and Answers

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Key Points

- The National Cancer Institute's (NCI) Cancer Information Service (CIS) educates the public about cancer prevention, risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and research (see Question 1).
- CIS information specialists provide the latest, most accurate information about cancer by telephone, TTY, instant messaging, and e-mail (see Questions 2 and 3).
- The CIS operates the NCI's Smoking Quitline (see Questions 1 and 4).
- Through its Partnership Program, the CIS works with established national, regional, and state organizations to reach those most in need of cancer information (see Question 7).
- The CIS takes part in health communications research to find new and better ways to educate people about health (see Question 8).

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1.   What is the purpose of the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service?

The National Cancer Institute (NCI), the Nation's lead agency for cancer research, established the Cancer Information Service (CIS) in 1975 to educate people about cancer prevention, risk factors, early detection, symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and research. The CIS is an essential part of NCI's cancer prevention and control efforts.

To provide information about cancer to patients and their families, physicians and other health professionals, and the public, the CIS has a three-pronged approach:

- Information specialists answer questions about cancer by telephone, TTY, instant messaging, and e-mail. They can provide printed and electronic NCI publications (see Questions 2, 3, and 5).

- The Partnership Program reaches those who may have limited access to health information (see Question 7).

- The Research Program helps researchers advance health communication practices (see Question 8).

In addition to the telephone service (1–800–4–CANCER) that answers questions about cancer, the CIS also operates the NCI's Smoking Quitline (1–877–44U–QUIT) to help smokers quit (see Question 4). Both telephone services offer recorded messages on a variety of topics (see Question 6).

2. **How can CIS information specialists help me?**

The CIS is a leader in providing the latest, most accurate information on cancer in language that is easy to understand. Information specialists can answer your questions about cancer and can tell you about NCI's printed and electronic materials.

CIS information specialists have access to comprehensive, accurate information on a range of cancer topics, including the most recent advances in cancer treatment. They are knowledgeable, caring, and experienced at explaining medical information. The service is confidential, and information specialists spend as much time as needed for thorough and personalized responses.

CIS information specialists cannot provide medical consultations. They do not take the place of your doctor. Information specialists also do not make referrals to specific doctors. However, they can tell you about clinical trials (research studies) and cancer-related services, such as treatment centers, mammography facilities, and other cancer organizations.

3. **How can I contact a CIS information specialist?**

You can contact an information specialist Monday through Friday as follows:

- **By telephone**: U.S. residents may call the CIS toll-free at 1–800–4–CANCER (1–800–422–6237). CIS information specialists answer calls in English or Spanish from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. local time.

- **By TTY**: People in the United States with TTY equipment may call toll-free at 1–800–332–8615. This service is available in English from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Eastern time.

- **Over the Internet (Instant Messaging)**: If you have Internet access, you can get live, online assistance through *LiveHelp*'s instant-messaging service. Information specialists can answer your questions about cancer and can help you use the NCI's Web site at http://www.cancer.gov on the Internet. This service is available in

English from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Eastern time. You can access *LiveHelp* on NCI's Web site at http://www.cancer.gov on the Internet (click on "Need Help?" and then click on the *"LiveHelp?"* icon). You can also access *LiveHelp* at https://cissecure.nci.nih.gov/livehelp/welcome.asp on the CIS Web site.

- **By e-mail**: If you have questions or comments or are unable to find what you need on the Web site, you can send an e-mail using the online contact form at http://www.cancer.gov/contact or to cancergovstaff@mail.nih.gov.

4.   How can I get help with quitting smoking?

You can reach smoking cessation counselors Monday through Friday as follows:

- **By telephone**: The CIS operates the NCI's Smoking Quitline at 1–877–44U–QUIT (1–877–448–7848). Smoking cessation counselors are available from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. local time. They offer help in English or Spanish.

- **Over the Internet (Instant Messaging)**: For those with Internet access, the *LiveHelp* instant-messaging service also offers help with quitting smoking. Smoking cessation counselors are available from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Eastern time at http://www.smokefree.gov and through http://www.cancer.gov on the Internet.

5.   How can I get NCI publications?

You may order NCI publications from the CIS by telephone (1–800–4–CANCER) or on the NCI's Web site at http://www.cancer.gov/publications on the Internet. You can read many NCI publications online and can print them out.

6.   How can I listen to recorded messages?

You may listen to recorded messages in English or Spanish by calling the NCI's Cancer Information Service or the Smoking Quitline at any time of day, 7 days a week:

- The toll-free telephone service at 1–800–4–CANCER offers recorded information about cancer prevention, treatment, and other topics.

- The NCI's Smoking Quitline at 1–877–44U–QUIT has messages about the risks of smoking, the benefits of quitting, and tips for quitting.

7.   What is the CIS Partnership Program?

The CIS has established partnerships with nonprofit, private, and other government organizations at the national, regional, and state levels. Partners help deliver messages and materials about cancer to people who may have difficulty obtaining health information because of educational, financial, cultural, or language barriers.

Through the Partnership Program, the CIS reaches people throughout the United States and its territories. The CIS works with partners that have an established presence in the region, are trusted within their communities, and are dedicated to serving minority and medically underserved populations. The CIS helps partners develop and evaluate programs on breast and cervical cancer screening, clinical trials, tobacco control, and cancer awareness, especially for medically underserved groups. The CIS also helps partners develop coalitions, conduct training on cancer-related topics, and use NCI resources.

8.   What is the CIS Research Program?

The CIS participates in cancer control and health communications research that supports NCI's priorities and programs. CIS research helps identify new and better ways to communicate health information to a variety of audiences. To date, the CIS has collaborated on more than 50 studies that have helped researchers learn better ways to communicate with people about healthy lifestyles, health risks, and how to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer.

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Related Resources

Publications (available at http://www.cancer.gov/publications)
- National Cancer Institute Fact Sheet 1.20, *Ordering National Cancer Institute Publications: Questions and Answers*
- National Cancer Institute Fact Sheet 1.23, *The U.S. National Cancer Institute*
- National Cancer Institute Fact Sheet 2.1, *Cancer Information Sources*
- National Cancer Institute Fact Sheet 10.19, *Questions and Answers About Smoking Cessation*

National Cancer Institute (NCI) Resources

Cancer Information Service (toll-free)
Telephone: 1–800–4–CANCER (1–800–422–6237)
TTY: 1–800–332–8615

Online

NCI's Web site: http://www.cancer.gov
LiveHelp, NCI's live online assistance:
https://cissecure.nci.nih.gov/livehelp/welcome.asp

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